A

SERMON

PREACH'D to the

NATIVES

OF

The County of Dorſet,

Reſiding in and about the Cities of *London* and *Weſtminſter*,

At St. *Mary Le Bowe*, on *Dec.* 8. 1692.

Being the Day of their

Anniverſary FEAST.

By the Lord Biſhop of *Rocheſter*.

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Acts IV. Verſ. 32.

And the Multitude of them that believed were of one Heart, and one Soul: Neither ſaid any of them, that ought of the things which he poſſeſſed was his own, but they had all things common.

IN the ſecond Chapter of this Book of the *Acts*, there is repreſented to us, as much as by Words a Thing ſo Wonderful can be expreſs'd, the Glorious Manner of the firſt Miraculous Deſcending of the *Holy Ghoſt*, on the Apoſtles, and Primitive Diſciples.

A Miracle, that gave a perfect Confirmation to all that had been done before, from the Creation to that Day, towards the Eſtabliſhing of the True Religion; and alſo gave Authority, to all that has been added ſince that Day, for the ſame End, on the ſame Foundation.

It clearly manifeſted to the World the Truth of the Chriſtian Faith, and moſt viſibly declared its Power: Fill'd the firſt Chriſtians Mouths with new, unknown, unſtudyed Tongues; and to all thoſe Tongues gave Utterance at once, to ſound forth the Works and Praiſes of GOD: Whilſt the Standers-by of all Nations all *marvelled*; and when every one heard his own Language, they were all *confounded*; as well they might, to find all Mankind now going to be united into one Church by the ſame extraordinary Way, by which they were at firſt ſcatter'd into many Nations, by a Multiplicity of Languages, and Variety of Speech.

After that firſt moſt aſtoniſhing Gift of Fiery and Cloven Tongues, we have next in the latter part of the ſecond, and in the third, and this fourth Chapter, an Account of St. *Peter*'s firſt Sermons to the People, who being come together out of all Countries to keep their *Pentecoſt* at *Jeruſalem*, and there meeting with ſo unexpected an Event, *were amazed* to think *what it ſhould mean.*

St. *Peter* tells them, This is that which GOD had foretold ſhould come to paſs *in the laſt Days*, that is, according to their underſtanding of

of those Words, in the Age of the *Messias*. And from thence he goes on to prove to them out of their Scriptures, that this *JESUS*, whom they had now *Crucified*, was the *Messias*, *both Lord and Christ*.

An Argument, which seem'd to require a long search into the whole Design of their Ceremonial Law, and a deep skill in all the Writings of their Prophets; that consisting all of dark Types, these being full of Mysteries: An Argument therefore, that might be thought fitter for their *Scribes*, and *Pharisees*, and most Learned Doctors, and the *High Priest* himself, than for an *Unlearned Galilean* and ignorant Fisherman to undertake.

Yet this very Fisherman so manag'd this Weighty and Mysterious Subject; with such Convincing Plainess, such Strength of Reason, as neither was nor could be taught by Art; with such undoubted Evidence of Scripture and Antiquity; such visible *Demonstration, and Power*; that the Meaness of his Person, and Trade of Life, soon ceas'd to be an Objection and against him, was so far from less'ning his Authority, that it became an unanswerable Proof of the Divinity of his Doctrine, and the Reality of his Inspiration.

Where-

Wherefore theſe firſt Sermons of St. *Peter* had a preſent and ſurprizing Effect; *Fear came upon the Soul of every Hearer*; *Three Thouſand Perſons were at once added to the Church*; the *Multitude* ſtrove, who ſhould firſt declare their Converſion, and Belief, and Deſire to be Baptiz'd. And as faſt as they came in, the New Converts were inſpired with the ſame Gift of Tongues, by which they had been Converted.

Juſt before, they had been obſtinate Unbelievers, perhaps Mockers of that Doctrine, whereof, juſt then in a Moment, they were compleatly furniſh'd with Abilities to become Interpreters and Teachers to all Mankind.

In my Text we have one remarkable Inſtance of the Bleſſed Spirit's coming down upon one of theſe firſt Aſſemblies of Chriſtians, in ſuch a marvellous Manner and Meaſure.

In the Verſe before 'tis ſaid, That *when they had prayed, the Place, where they were met, was ſhaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt.* And then ſtrait follow three moſt ſignal Effects of this Wondrous Diſpenſation.

Firſt, That *they ſpake the Word of GOD with boldneſs*; without any farther doubt in their own Minds, without any dread of Oppoſition from others, though the whole World was againſt

againſt them; with ſuch an inſpir'd Boldneſs, as became the Supernatural Commiſſion, they had then receiv'd, to ſpeak the Word of *GOD*; and a Boldneſs, that was juſtified by the Supernatural Works, which thenceforth accompanied their Speaking.

Secondly, That all the New Converts were of United Judgments and Affections. Not only the Apoſtles, but *the Multitude of them that believ'd, were of one Heart, and one Soul.*

Thirdly, That this inward Unity of *Heart, and Soul*, was outwardly demonſtrated by a free, and mutual Communication of their Temporal Goods, and Poſſeſſions. *None of them ſaid, That ought of the things he poſſeſt was his own, but they had all things common.*

Now of theſe three immediate Conſequences of this admirable Revelation, the firſt, which was their *Speaking the Word of GOD with Boldneſs*, I ſhall paſs by at this time; and by GOD's Aſſiſtance, and your Patience, rather apply my ſelf to the two laſt, as being more proper for the Occaſion, and ſuitable to the End of this your Friendly, and Religious Meeting.

For the great Intention, My Beloved Countrymen, of your Aſſembling thus together in Publick

Publick Devotions, and Amicable Society, being, as you all profeſs, and, as I am verily perſwaded, for the increaſe of Brotherly Love, and Good-Will among your ſelves here preſent, and to promote Charity towards thoſe of our Country, who may be abſent through Poverty; I, for my part, know not how *I* can better perform the Task, your Kindneſs has laid upon me in this Solemnity, than by Recommending to your Devout Meditations, and, in ſome ſort alſo, to your Pious Imitation, this great, and moſt Chriſtian Example of the firſt Chriſtians.

Firſt, Their Unanimity, and Concord; *They were all of one Heart, and one Soul.*

Secondly, Their Liberal, and Generous Diſtribution of their Goods, to their Brethren that wanted; *None of them eſteem'd any thing he had to be his own, but they had all things common.*

I begin with the firſt, *They were all of one Heart, and one Soul.* This is the firſt here in Order; and was indeed the Cauſe of the other. For how can there be a greater, or more powerful Motive to the outward Charity of Works, than internal Unity of Mind? Where the Goods of the Soul are entirely Communicated,

Communicated, it is almoſt impoſſible that there ſhould be an abſolute engroſſing of the Goods of Fortune; ſo Men are wont to call them, though they are, in truth, the Gifts of Heaven, as well as the other; and as ſuch, are to be diſtributed by the ſame Laws.

They were therefore all *of one Heart, and one Soul*; than which a nearer Agreement cannot be deſcribed, or imagin'd: The Heart (if there be any difference of the Expreſſion in Scripture-Language) being to be taken for the chief Seat of the Will and Affections, and the Soul of the Judgment and Underſtanding. Nor was this only ſpoken of St. *Peter*, and the reſt of the Twelve; nor only of the Apoſtles, and Seventy Diſciples; nor only of the firſt Hundred and Twenty in the Upper Room; nor only of the Three Thouſand Converted by one Sermon; but of All; of the Multitude of them that Believed.

Certainly ſome ſtrange, and unuſual thing muſt needs happen, as here it did, that could bring together, and cement ſuch a *Multitude*, ſo as to make them be of *one Heart*; that could perſuade ſuch a *Multitude* to converſe together, and conſpire in the ſame Thoughts, and Deſires, as if they had but *one Soul*. Where-

as a *Multitude*, however compoſed, too commonly ſeems by its inconſtant, and fluctuating Counſels, its partial Debates, and perverſe Opinions, and head-ſtrong Reſolutions, to have more Hearts, and more Souls than it really has; even more than it has Bodies.

In the Weakneſs, and Ignorance, or prejudicate Knowledge of a *Multitude*, how eaſily are the Seeds of Diſſention and Contradiction ſown? By the various Intereſts, or wilful Humours, or violent Paſſions of a *Multitude*, how quickly are they rais'd, and inflamed? And when once a *Multitude* is engaged in Diviſions, how hard a thing is it to compoſe them again?

A *Multitude* therefore could never have been ſo united, had they not been a *Multitude* of Believers. Nor then neither, had not the Holy Ghoſt, the Bleſſed Author of all Peace and Truth, inclined them to it: Had not that taught them to make the Matter of their Belief to be the Cauſe, and Ground of their Concord, not of their Separation; as too often ſince has been experienc'd.

The Difficulty of ſo Divine a Work, to Unite a mixt *Multitude* of all People, and Languages, to Unite them ſo cloſely, to Animate

mate them all with ſuch Cordial Affections, did well become the Almighty Power of the Holy Spirit: It well became, and could only belong to that Bleſſed Perſon, who is one GOD, the ſame with the Father, and the Son, GOD Bleſſed for ever, to inſpire ſo great a Degree of Union into the Minds of all, whom it fill'd with its firſt Gifts, and Graces, and Benedictions.

And, Beloved in our Lord and Saviour, this Heavenly Fruit of the Heavenly Spirit's being thus pour'd forth on the Primitive Chriſtians, was not only intended, as ſome of the other Fruits of it were, to confirm our Faith; but alſo to inſtruct us in one of our moſt neceſſary Duties.

The Apoſtles Miraculous Acting, and Speaking, with ſuch Invincible Freedom and Power, requires our Belief of the Faith that they Preach'd: And GOD took this way to eſtabliſh it: But that Marvellous Unanimity of their firſt Converts concerns our practiſe, and was deſign'd to direct it.

It is not given us to follow them Step by Step in their other extraordinary Privileges and Prerogatives: But in their humble, and Fraternal Condeſcentions to each other; their

peaceable Acquieſcence in the ſame Divine Truths; their meek Obedience to the ſame Holy Laws; in theſe we may, and ought to follow them.

The Glory of the Signs and Wonders which they wrought, was enough for GOD's purpoſe in propagating the Goſpel to all Times, and Places: But we of theſe latter Ages can never arrive at the ſame Abilities; nor ought we to emulate them in what was Peculiar to their time, and Perſonal to Themſelves. Whoever does, he is likely to ſhew more Proofs of his own Natural Vanity, or Spiritual Pride, than of any Supernatural Power, or Illumination.

Yet ſtill it is left to us, and it is incumbent upon us, with the utmoſt of our Zeal, to imitate their other Virtues and Graces, which are, though of a lower Degree, yet of a Perpetual Duration for the Benefit of the Church; Such as their Simplicity of Heart, their Agreement in the ſame Acts of Piety, and their Conſent in the ſame Chriſtian Faith.

In thoſe their more exalted and inſpired Endowments, we muſt of neceſſity be defective, ſince we cannot have any the leaſt proportion of their immediately-Divine Helps to acquire them;

them; And becauſe thoſe are not ſo neceſſary (indeed not at all neceſſary) in this common and ſetled Courſe of Chriſtianity, as they were for the firſt Founding of it. But as for theſe their other good and gracious Diſpoſitions, ſuch as their Meekneſs, Self-Denial, Patience, Long-ſuffering, Forbearance of each others Frailties, and Fellow-feeling of each others Infirmities; ſuch as inclined them to this Unity of Heart, and Soul; and are all ſtill equally neceſſary to us; towards our attaining of theſe, we have ſtill a ſufficient Aſſiſtance from that *Father of Lights*, from whom they are derived.

Of all theſe, My Brethren, it was eſpecially deſign'd that there ſhould be a perpetual Succeſſion deriv'd down on all, that ſucced them in the ſame Faith. In theſe they are to be our laſting Patterns to the End of the World. I mean in this Mutual Concurrence and Conformity of Minds; This Charitable Compliance of Judgments, and Endearment of Affections among our ſelves; this mild, gentle, tender-hearted Temper towards all Men; this ſubmiſſive Uniformity in GOD's Worſhip: All of them Virtues, and Graces that exceedingly contribute to the very Being, much more

more to the Well-being of the Christian Church: All of them so peculiarly the Effects, and certain Influences of the Holy Ghost, that they are expresly call'd *the Unity of the Spirit*; and that, which is inseparably annext to it, *The Bond of Peace.*

Wherefore, in the Name of GOD, let us all fix our Eyes, and our Hearts on that uncorrupt Original, of the first Christians Agreement in sound Doctrine, and holy Worship, which was, as you have heard, the genuine, and immediate Off-spring of the true Spirit of GOD.

That most Christian Communion which began so soon, so gloriously! That most happy Word Ὁμοθυμαδὸν! That most Spiritual one Accord! That most desirable Unity of Heart and Soul! which was most frequently and most religiously enjoyn'd all Christians, by the Author and Finisher of our Faith! And which took so effectually in them, that were the first Publishers of it! When they come to recommend it to us, you see with what Vehemence they do it: Beseeching us, *If there be any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels of Mercies, Fulfil ye my Joy,* saith the Apostle,

Apoſtle, *Phil.* 2. 1. *That you be like-minded, having the ſame Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind.*

And when they come to uſe Arguments for it, you ſee how they preſs us all the ways that can be thought of, to make it enter into our Souls; how they oblige us to it, by all the Conſiderations of Duty, of Aſſiſtance, of Intereſt, of Benefit, and Reward: How they farther engage us, by many moſt weighty Arguments drawn from the very Subſtance, and End of our pure and undefiled Religion: By the Unity of our Baptiſm into one Faith; of our Hope, which is one happy Eternal Life; of our Head, which is one Lord Chriſt; of his Body, which is one Church, the Mother of us all; and of that common Senſe, and mutual Participation of Helps, Affections, and Comforts, that ought for ever to be maintain'd between all the Children of ſuch a Mother, all the Members of ſuch a Body.

You ſee how we are all provok'd to Love, and bound, in our ſeveral Stations, to labour for a Spiritual Unity, by all theſe, and other ſuch unanſwerable Grounds of Perſuaſion. But that which eſpecially ſets it home to us is this, That we ſee the Duty is practicable, we ſee it lively

lively ſet forth in that Bleſſed Model which is given us in this fourth, and in the ſecond Chapter of this Book; It gives us the moſt perfect Example of Unanimity, that ever was ſhewn to the World.

And that we may follow it as we ought, it behoves us to conſider which way the firſt Chriſtians came into this ſtate, that we may take the ſame, as far as we can in our Circumſtances.

We ſee then, how when all the Apoſtles of Chriſt, and all our Lords own Diſciples, attended the fulfilling of his own great Promiſe of ſending the Holy Ghoſt, to Comfort them, and to Teach them all things; to Teach them, and as a Comforter to Teach them; to joyn with the Precepts, and Counſels of a Teacher, the Gentleneſs and Favours of a Comforter; then the chief account we have of them, in preparation to all this, is, That *they were all with one accord in one place:* When that Promiſe was accompliſh'd, when the Holy Ghoſt was ſent, the next account we have of them is, that *They were all of one Heart, and one Soul.*

Obſerve, I beſeech you, in that firſt General Meeting of the whole Church, than which never any ſince was more Venerable, nor

nor will be, till the laſt Day of General Judgment; when the Bleſſed Spirit of *GOD* did not only hover above over all their Heads, as he did over the Waters at the Creation; from whence all the Order and Beauty of all the Creatures proceeded; but ſate upon each of their Heads, and over-ſpread their Minds, and enlarg'd their Hearts, and looſen'd their Tongues, to the Amazement of all Beholders, who thereby ſoon became Converts: There was then no one Circumſtance, that more advantageouſly contributed to their Univerſal Receiving of that Divine Revelation, than that they were all united, *with one accord, in one place:* There was no one Conſequence of that Revelation, which the ſame Holy Ghoſt thought fitter, and more inſtructive to be everlaſtingly recorded in Scripture, than that afterwards they all remain'd united in Doctrine, in Devotions, in Charity: There are no other Principles or Practiſes here mention'd upon which they united, but ſuch as were truly Evangelical, and tend directly to the uniting of the Myſtical Body of Chriſt to the end of the World.

They continued ſtedfaſtly in the Apoſtles Doctrine, in Fellowſhip, in Breaking of Bread, and

in Prayers. They continued *daily with one accord in the Temple, and Breaking Bread from House to House,* or in the House, that is, in part of the Temple also, or in the several Houses at *Jerusalem*, where the Apostles had their Congregations: There they *did eat their Meat*, that is, their Spiritual Food in the Holy Communion, and also their Natural, but Sanctifi'd Meat in their Feasts of Charity; and did all this *with Gladness, and singleness of Heart, praising GOD*, who had called them to that Excellent Way of Life, and graciously accepted them in it, and gave them a publick Testimony of all this, in *the Favour of all the People.*

What could be done more towards uniting their *Hearts*, and *Souls?* After they had repented, and were Baptized, and were *filled with Grace, and Power from on high*, First, *they continued in the Apostles Doctrine*; in that, and no other. *They receiv'd the Word with all readiness of Mind, and search'd the Scriptures, whether those things were so.* Having found the Truth, they stedfastly adher'd to it without wavering and uncertainty; whatsoever Inquiry they made into it, it was without any needless Curiosity, or over-subtil Inventions about it. Secondly,

Secondly, They continued *in Fellowſhip*; that is, either in a ſtrict Communion of all the Offices of Chriſtianity in general, or, as the Learned Dr. *Hammond* underſtands the word Κοινωνία, in a Charitable Communication of their good things to thoſe that wanted.

Thirdly, They continued together *in Breaking of Bread*; that is, in the frequent Participation of the Bleſſed Myſtery of the Lord's Supper: One part, the *Breaking of Bread*, being here, as *Drinking* is elſewhere, [1 *Cor.* 12. 13.] put to ſignifie that whole Sacrament: though never in Scripture was any one kind of it commanded to be Adminiſtred in ſtead of the whole, as in the Church of *Rome* is moſt Sacrilegiouſly practiſed.

But in the due, and conſtant receiving that Holy Sacrament, in both kinds, no doubt, they all *continued*: That moſt Sacred Ordinance, which is, or ſhould be ſo much the great Inſtrument of Unity among Chriſtians, that it is moſt properly termed the Communion.

Fourthly, After they had thus *broken* that Heavenly *Bread*; and *Eaten their Meat*, their Bodily Meat probably in their Charitable Feaſts, what follow'd but *Gladneſs*, *and*

Singleneſs of Heart? *Gladneſs*, the ſure Companion, at leaſt in the end, of a *ſingle* innocent Heart, endued with true Chriſtian Simplicity; as Darkneſs and Diſcomfort is the never-failing Attendant, one time or other, firſt or laſt, of a double deceitful Mind, and Hypocritical Spirit.

Laſtly, They continued *daily, with one accord, in the Temple, praiſing GOD.* Though the Lord from on High had viſited them with the moſt gracious Diſpenſation, that ever was revealed from Heaven; yet, notwithſtanding that extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon them, they never intermitted, but exactly obſerv'd the ordinary Courſe of their Religious Duties.

And for this they reſorted *daily* to the *Temple:* Which though they conſider'd now as having loſt all its Typical Sanctity, by the renting of the Veil at the Death of Chriſt; yet, as Chriſt himſelf taught them immediately before his Death, they look'd upon it as being ſtill GOD's Houſe by Conſecration, and as being *a Houſe of Prayer for all Nations.*

Thus even at that very time, when they had receiv'd the Bleſſed Spirit in ſo abundant a Meaſure; yet from that ſo bright an Inſpiration,

tion, they took not any Opportunity, nor framed any pretence to condemn, or deſpiſe the common Offices of the Church, or to think themſelves above all the preſcribed Ordinances of their wonted Worſhip; but therefore, the rather, they frequented the Service of GOD, according to their accuſtomed Manner.

They continued *daily*, to ſhew the unwearied Fervor, and ſtated Regularity of their Piety. They continued daily *with one accord*, to ſignifie the Harmonious Agreement of their Spiritual Society. They continued daily with one accord *in the Temple*, to teſtifie their Preference of Eſtabliſh'd, Conſecrated Places, and their Obſervance of Orderly Decency in their Devotions.

Nor did they only there continue in Prayer, in Petitioning Heaven for Benefits to come, but in *Praiſing GOD* for Mercies receiv'd: Which is the Nobleſt, the moſt Sublime, the moſt Cœleſtial Part of Chriſtian Worſhip; as being indeed the chief Buſineſs of Heaven it ſelf.

And if there be any Communion of Saints, which we muſt believe, or utterly renounce one Article of our Creed; if any ſuch thing,

as

as a Holy Catholick Church, whereof ſurely the proud Boaſtings, and falſe Pretences of *Rome* cannot wholly aboliſh the thing it ſelf; then there is no manner of Queſtion, but the largeſt Meaſures of Grace will be Communicated to our Souls, in theſe Publick Offices of *Prayer*, and *Praiſe*, which at once, as the whole Primitive Church did then, ſo a conſiderable part of it now, with united Tongues, and Affections, and Spirits more united, preſents to the Throne of Grace.

That is the Firſt Part of my Text; *The Multitude of them that believed were all of one Heart, and one Soul*, in this Senſe, and to this Degree, and in the Uniform Performance of all theſe Spiritual Duties.

Now, My Brethren, upon this ſo intimate an Agreement of their Underſtandings, Wills, and Affections in Matters of Faith, and Worſhip, there preſently ſucceeded a like Harmony of Good Works: They all practis'd a general Diſtribution, and Participation of each others Earthly Riches, and Poſſeſſions: Which is the laſt Effect here mention'd of their being all *filled with the Holy Ghoſt*. *None of them ſaid that ought he poſſeſſed was his own, but they had all things common.* They

They were really their own things, as much as any other Mens Goods were theirs: But their new Principle of Chriſtian Charity had made them to alter their Thoughts ſo much about them, as even to change, and transfer the very Propriety of them.

It cannot indeed be denyed, but of ſuch an extraordinary more than Brotherly Love, and ſtrict Fellowſhip, as this of the Apoſtles, and Primitive Diſciples, there had before ſome Shadows and Footſteps appear'd in the Practiſe of ſome Men of other Religions, both among the Jews and the Gentils.

Among the Jews, ſuch a Communication of all things was, in great part, uſed by that Sect which they call'd *Eſſens*, towards Men of their own way of Diſcipline. And a Generation of Men they were, who, of all others, came neareſt the Chriſtian Inſtitution: So that, as *Grotius* tells us, our Lord had many of his firſt Diſciples out of the Men of that Profeſſion: For which Reaſon probably, as he obſerves, they alone were ſeldom or never reprehended by our Saviour himſelf, as all the other Sects were very frequently, and ſometimes exceeding ſharply.

Such

Such a Communication alſo was, in ſome ſort, in uſe among the *Pythagoreans*, and ſome other Fraternities of the Heathen Philoſophers, and ſome of their wiſeſt Polities of Civil Society: Whoſe chief Aim being the Advancement of Human Nature by all Natural Means; and they believing they could not do that by any better way, than by raiſing Frienſhip to the higheſt pitch; which they juſtly eſteem'd the moſt perfect Natural State of Mankind, in this World: They therefore Cultivated eſpecially that kind of Friendly Life, which they called Κοινόβιον, that ſignifies the ſame with the Phraſe in my Text, of having *all things common.*

But notwithſtanding all this, it were eaſie to prove, that of all the Communities of Goods, which have been ever eſſay'd among Men; this of the Apoſtles, and firſt Chriſtians, was the moſt Excellent, the moſt Innocent, the moſt Spiritual, and ſincerely Charitable kind of it.

As for that Sect of the Jews, though they did bountifully diſpenſe their Eſtates in common to Men of their own Party, and Form of Life; yet we do not find, but the ſame Men ſtill retained ſomething of the general Temper

Temper of the Jewiſh Nation; which was to be kind only to themſelves, and their Proſelytes, but rigid, and hard-hearted to all the World beſides; eſpecially to all that differed from them in Religion.

So that in Truth the Divine Efficacy of the Chriſtian Faith, in its firſt beginnings, was ſcarce ever more illuſtrated in any thing than in this, that it firſt undertook to convince the Jews; and could bring ſo many of them ſo ſpeedily from the moſt ſtiff-necked Arrogance, and narrow-handed Auſterity, to the greateſt Humility and Generoſity, that ever Mankind was acquainted with.

For as for the Heathens alſo, who profeſs'd to hold ſuch a Community of all things; they generally went ſo far in the abuſe of it, as to lay all things common; not only lawful, but unlawful things too; even ſome of thoſe things, which, by the Laws of GOD and of Nations, had been made moſt proper, and peculiar. But in ſuch things the greater the Community, the greater the Wickedneſs.

Whereas this Evangelical Community here inſtituted in the Primitive Church, had all the quite contrary Advantages, and Perfections.

First, It was most pure, spotless, and unblameable. It was only a Communication of Lawful Things; and of such Things, as might Lawfully be used in *common*. But all *Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness*, all Imagination of partaking in unlawful things, they universally condemned; and their practise was accordingly. They restrained themselves, and taught us, to *abstain* not only from the real Guilt, but from *the very appearance of Evil*. They utterly abhorred the least suspicion of Licentiousness, under a pretence of Christian Freedom: They knew, that although through Christ they were *free indeed*, yet he had redeemed them only from the Burden of Legal Observances, and not from the Obligation of Moral, or Natural Laws.

Secondly, As their Liberal Distribution of their Temporal Inheritances, for the Relief of those among them, that wanted, did flow from the most Divine Principle of Christian Love, and Tenderness towards all their Brethren of the same Faith, and Communion; so it was at the same time accompanied with an unconfined Good-will, an open-hearted Kindness, and enlarged Bowels of Compassion, to all Mankind besides. What St. *Paul* exhorted all

all Christians to do, they perform'd in an Eminent Degree: *As they had Opportunity, they did good to all Men*; though they did it *chiefly to those of the Houshold of Faith.*

And that indeed is the true Christian Charity. It may have its Degrees; but never admits of its Contraries: So that all, who are sincerely thus affected, may express their Charity to some more than to others; but must never be uncharitable, much less unjust, to any.

To all we are bound to practise a perpetual Communication of our good Will, and good Offices, and of our Goods too in the Works of Justice, and Charity: In the Works of Charity, according to our Capacities; in the Works of Justice always, and without reserve. For only the Able can be Charitable: And it may not sometimes be a Man's own fault, that he is not able to be outwardly Charitable: But it is ever a Man's own fault only, if he is not outwardly Just, and at least inwardly Charitable to all.

Thirdly, This free dispensing of their Goods and Possessions, that was then made by the Able to sustain the Unable and Afflicted, was far from being intended to cherish the Lazi-

neſs, or to encourage the Negligence, or to nouriſh the Vanity and Pride of any that were thus relieved; but to quite contrary Purpoſes; that is, either to ſupply the real Wants of the innocently Neceſſitous; or to comfort thoſe, that were under fierce Perſecutions; or to excite thoſe to indefatigable Induſtry, who were to labour in the Work of the Lord; that with more Leaſure, and Freedom from Worldly Cares, and Diverſions, they might attend the moſt important Buſineſs of ſaving Souls, and ſpreading the *Everlaſting Goſpel.*

Theſe, My Brethren, were the only, or the principal Ends of the firſt Chriſtians having *all things common*: Ends very different from thoſe of the Monaſtical Life, as it has been univerſally abuſed in all Chriſtendom: Though that pretends to come neareſt the firſt Chriſtians retirement from the World, and free partaking of what each other poſſeſſed, and living their Life in *common.*

But towards the imitating of that humble, devout, and ſelf-denying Life of the Apoſtles, and their Diſciples, it is not ſufficient for Men, or Women only to profeſs a ſullen Reſervedneſs, or unprofitable Separation from the World: For ſome Perſons, in ſhew of a more Spiritual

Spiritual Life, to live idly upon others miſtaken Charity, is not to practiſe the Primitive Community of Goods. Whoever will be really like thoſe great Examples of Self-denial and Abſtinence, 'tis not enough only to follow them ſuperſtitiouſly, and ſervilely, in ſome one little accidental thing, ſome indifferent Habit, or Action of their Lives: Rather we muſt endeavour to reſemble them in their real Virtues, and ſolid Excellencies, and in carrying on the Work of GOD, by doing all the Good we can in this World, as they did.'

Fourthly, It is obſervable, that of the Goods and Eſtates of the firſt Chriſtians, thus brought as Free-Will-Offerings into one Common Treaſury, the Diſpoſition was ordered with great Prudence, Equity, and Piety; and that at firſt by no leſs Men than the Apoſtles themſelves; afterwards indeed it was committed to inferior Miniſters, but ſtill at the Appointment, and under the Inſpection of the Apoſtles. In this Chapter it is ſaid, That *as many as were poſſeſſed of Land or Houſes, ſold them, and brought the Prices of the things that were ſold, and laid them down at the Apoſtles Feet; and Diſtribution was made to every Man according as he had need; ſo that there was none among them that lacked.*'

Behold,

Behold, I pray. As that was the first General Purse (if I may so call it) of Christian Charity, that ever was raised by the Power of the Christian Faith, so the careful directing of it was an Employment worthy of the Apostolical Office it self, and becoming their high Dignity, and Super-eminent Station in the Church of GOD.

For the very Apostles discharge of their Duty, it was not sufficient, that *with great Power they gave Witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus:* Nor was it enough for them to Baptize Men into, and Confirm them in his Faith; nor by Exhortation, to Rouze and Awaken the Drowzy World; nor by Reproof to Chastise, and Admonish the Stubborn and Negligent; nor by seasonable Counsels and Comforts, to Strengthen the Doubtful, and Refresh the Weak: But by a constant giving their own, according to their Abilities, and by a diligent Collection of others Alms-deeds, and by a wise Administration of both, they became the first Publick Almoners of the whole Christian World.

You see, in a time when the whole Christian Church was in a State of outward Poverty, and Misery, that was undoubtedly one of

of the most Christian Offices then, to relieve the Indigent, to comfort the Distressed, to provide for the Widows, Orphans, Captives, Aged, and Infirm. And certainly therefore the like Deeds of Mercy and Piety ought never to have a less Esteem among all Christians to the End of the World: Especially in times of the Churches Prosperity.

However, this we are sure of, so highly did the first Planters of Christianity, in their time, value such common Works of Compassion and Bounty, performed in a right Evangelical Method.

And indeed it is wonderful to consider, almost incredible to tell, how great Advantages the Gospel obtained, in its first setting forth, by the Merciful, Charitable, and Hospitable Conversation of its first Professors: When the World beheld Men so despicable in their outward Condition, yet enobled and adorned with all that Lustre of Spiritual Gifts: When Men saw them so ambitious of another World; so unconcern'd for this; so not in the least desirous of what was other Mens, so Generous in what was their own; using their own things so moderately themselves, as if they had belonged to others; only shewing them to be

their

their own, by their readineſs of giving them to others: When Men ſaw things, ſo much above the common rate of Human Nature, produced in theſe Men; and that only by their being Chriſtians, they could not but have a high Eſteem of that Excellent Religion; they could not but be ſtrongly inclined to embrace it themſelves.

You have heard, that the Reaſons here aſſign'd why the firſt Chriſtians had ſo ſoon *the Favour of all the People*, were principally three. The firſt, That *they went about from Houſe to Houſe, eating their Meat with Gladneſs, and Singleneſs of Heart:* There is their innocent Hoſpitality, and their right uſe of the true Chriſtian Liberty in that particular. The ſecond, That all, who believ'd, *continued together, with one accord, in Prayers and Praiſing GOD:* There is their publick owning of Religion, and Zeal for GOD's Worſhip. The third, That *they ſold their Goods and Poſſeſſions, and diſtributed them to all Men, as every Man had need:* There is the Univerſal Extent of their Charity.

And for this laſt Cauſe chiefly it was, that *they had the favour of all the People*; as the aforemention'd Excellent Interpreter conceives.

It

It is the Doing of Works of Liberality, and Bounty in the sight of all the People, that most naturally gains their Favour and Affections. Of all Religious Actions, none are more praise-worthy or amiable; none more acceptable to GOD and Men, than the visible Works of Mercy and Piety; such as are freely and bountifully bestowed either for the Service, Comelineſs, and Honor of GOD's Worship in his Temples; or for refreshing the Minds, and feeding, cloathing, and relieving the Bodies of the Poor and Needy, which are his Temples also.

And, My Brethren, this their abundant Goodneſs and Benignity, this sweet-smelling Sacrifice to GOD, this most delectable Savour among Men, this best-hallowed Incenſe that ever was seen on Earth, or roſe up towards Heaven, continued to adorn, and perfume the whole Christian Name for several Ages, their irreconcileable Enemies themselves being Witneſſes.

It is very memorable that they had the forced Applauſe, and envious Praiſe of *Julian* the Apoſtate himself in this particular. For in an Epiſtle which he wrote to one of his chief Heathen Prieſts, wherein he earneſtly exhorted him, and all his Idolatrous Brethren, to oppoſe the powerful Progreſs of the Goſpel for the future, by better, wiſer, and more Virtuous Arts

than hitherto they had done; and to attempt the subversion of Christianity by copying after the Christians themselves, in those very Methods, by which it had grown so formidable to their false Gods. He more especially by Name Recommendeth two or three of those Laudable Practices among Christians to their Studious Imitation.

One was, Their Integrity and Sanctimony of Life in general. Another, Their decent Ceremonies, and comely Rites in the Interment of their Dead. A third, *Their Humanity, and Charity to the Afflicted, though Strangers to them*; which, as he goes on, *is so remarkable, that the Impious Galileans*, (a Name with which he was wont to reproach the first Christians, and our Lord Christ himself) *these very Impious Galileans*, says he, *do not only maintain, and support their own Poor, but ours also.* A plain Confession, in Commendation of the first Christians Practice, extorted by the force of Truth, from the spitefully impious Pen of the Apostate himself.

And in this Blessed State the Christian Church in great part remained through all its first, purest, and most disinterested Ages; till the World, the Secular Empire, the Pleasures, the Riches, and Vanities of it were let in upon it.

But

But till then, with the same Coelestial Arms of Genuine Doctrine at first delivered, and the same prevailing Power of Miraculous Works at first bestowed, they converted or confounded their Enemies: And at the same time, with the same joint, though slender, Stock of Earthly Goods religiously disposed, they supported each others, and, in some measure, their Adversaries Necessities, and happily supply'd their own want of Earthly Power.

So they lived, as looking on themselves to be parts of the same Christian Family, Children of the same Heavenly Father, Members of the same Spiritual Body; and took care of, and commiserated and sympathized with each other accordingly; seeming, as if they had all the same Desires, the same Griefs, the same Joys, the same Interests in this World as well as the future; having *all things common to all*, as if (which I can never too often repeat) *they were all of one Heart, and one Soul.*

Their chief *Treasure* they laid up *in Heaven, where neither Moth can corrupt, nor Thieves break through and steal.* And whatever *Treasure* any of them had upon Earth, they quickly placed that out of the reach of the Moths corrupting, or the Thieves stealing, not laying it up, but by scattering it abroad into many Hands, and putting it out to the best use. Thus

Thus they made their Temporal Riches to be to them as the Gate of Heaven; which, GOD knows, have been to many ſince, that call themſelves Chriſtians too, as the Gate of Hell. They little cared, or rather they very much cared, how *common* they made their fading Wealth, their corruptible, and corrupting Abundance of this Worlds Goods; ſince by the Fundamental Privileges of their holy Profeſſion, they had ſo many other, ſo many greater things *in common*: One common Faith in one common Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter; one Communion of Saints; one Hope of the common Salvation.

By theſe irreſiſtible Ways, and Inſtruments, My Beloved Brethren, was the Lord pleas'd to found, and amplifie the Chriſtian Church; and thereby to *add daily to it great Numbers of ſuch as ſhould be ſaved.* Whatever now of all this is abſolutely inimitable, and never to be copied after by us, either by reaſon of the diſtance of Times and Places; or Cuſtoms of Nations changed; or Diverſity of Gifts in ſeveral Ages; or the different State of Chriſtianity in this Age; all that ſhould be the Subject of our Belief, our Wonder, and our Praiſe.

But whatever of it is imitable, and may again be applyed to our Circumſtances, that we ſhould

ſhould make the Object of our Zealous Studies, and Devout Emulations.

'Tis granted, we are not now obliged to that their firſt way of Converſation, when *none among them called any thing his own, but they had all things common.* Now, the *Bleſſings of this Life*, we poſſeſs, we may innocently enjoy, as our own Property, quite diſtinct from the Rights of other Men to it, as their Rights are diſtinguiſhed from ours. But withal we muſt be mindful, that ſtill in reſpect to GOD, we are all only Tenants, and Uſufructuaries: He alone is the true Proprietor, and ſole Lord of all: Though for our comfort and encouragement, He, in his infinite Mercy, has declared, That what part or portion ſoever of it we diſtribute in a right manner, to whomſoever it be, if even to thoſe, to whom Nature, or Laws, or Cuſtom obliges us to be kind and merciful, if we give it to them for his ſake, that he accepts, as return'd and paid to himſelf.

You have been told, that all lawful things were made common to the firſt Chriſtians for that particular time. But now all things are again become peculiar and ſeveral, and ſeem to return to their old Boundaries of *Meum, & Tuum*, with us as with the reſt of Mankind; and 'twere well indeed, if thoſe Bounds were univer-

universally observ'd. Yet still I must say, that among Christians, such as are so indeed, and not only in Name, some part of those things, which are most a Mans own, are to be so dispensed, and dispersed to others, to so many others, by so many Titles, that at last it can only be just said, what is a Christians own is not *common* to all.

As we are Christians, we are all engaged to shew some Effects of our Kindness and Charity to all, that are in want, as they are Christians; to all in extream want, as they are Men; even to Strangers and Aliens; nay to Enemies and Persecutors: Much more to all Friends, and Kinsmen, all Neighbours and Countrymen.

And that indeed, My Dear Countrymen, has been the chief Aim of this latter part of my whole Discourse, as I question not but it is the great Purpose and Design of your present Assembly.

No Man can deny, but as to the Country, whence we all have sprung, *our Lot* has fallen to be born in a *pleasant*, and fruitful *Place:* And I am confident, many that hear me this Day, have there also a *goodly Inheritance*; and many, if not there, I am sure have elsewhere: And you know the old Gospel-Rule, *To whom much is given, of them much is required.* To

To ſuch of you therefore, give me leave to conclude my Speech: And in the Name, and by the Bowels of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, I exhort you, as Fellow-feeling Members of the ſame Myſtical Body; as Members alſo of the ſame Political Body and Country, to extend your pious and charitable Aſſiſtance towards the diſtreſſed and indigent Natives of the ſame Country: Now eſpecially on this your Solemn *Feaſt-Day*; that when you ſhall *eat your Meat with Gladneſs*, they may not be quite empty and diſconſolate.

I muſt tell you, Charity is the beſt Companion of all Publick Feaſting: It is the beſt, and moſt Chriſtian Argument to recommend it; I had almoſt ſaid to juſtifie it. Certain it is, that was the chief Reaſon, for which the Primitive Chriſtians allowed of Feaſting at all; their Feaſts being therefore, as I have already ſaid, peculiarly ſtyled *Feaſts of Charity*.

Conſider then, I beſeech you, though GOD does not now expect from you to make all your Goods common to others as largely as they did; yet ſtill he calls upon you, in your Proportion, to communicate to others of your Goods, as kindly, if poſſible, as they did.

Their Community of all things properly belong'd to them, as they were the firſt Chriſtians.

ans. But the Example of their diffusive Charity obliges you, if you will be Christians, [illegible] will be *followers* of them, *as they were of Christ*, who *gave himself* for you, for this very Reason, that you should approve your selves to be his *peculiar People*, by being *zealous of good Works*.

'Tis true, GOD now permits every Man's Estate to be his own, according to the Laws of his Country: But still some good part of it is always, and upon some Occasions, all of it is subject to the Laws of Christianity: And the more GOD suffers it to be ours, ought we, in return, the more to make it his.

Nay, let us remember, that our Temporal perishing Goods and Riches are then most our own, when we most distribute them as GOD commands. Then, and then only, if GOD says true, we shall really enjoy, and improve the best way, and bring a lasting Blessing on what we keep to our selves. And for what we thus part with, GOD will recompense an hundred-fold into our Bosoms; of Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost in this World; of *Joys unspeakable and full of Glory in the World to come.* AMEN.

FINIS